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ABSTRACT

The level of professional development and functioning of the academic adviser is discussed. According to Canon (1976), professionals function on three levels of development. Advisers at the first level of functioning are primarily identified to their professional subspecialty and subunit (e.g., peer advising, undeclared students). Such staff people are generally unaware of others and duplicate what others are doing. On the second level are staff whose primary identification is to the entire student enterprise. They function cohesively, securely, and cooperatively. Finally, advisers at the third level of staff development are the most effectively and conceptually linked with others, because their programs are interwoven with the bulk of the institution's goals that extend beyond the realm of support services. This three-level scheme is used to assess the level of professional development or functioning suggested by programs presented at the 1983 meeting of the National Conference on Academic Advising. It is judged that 46 percent of the conference presentations were intended for an audience functioning at level 1, while 39 percent were designed for a level 2 audience, and 15 percent was directed toward the interests of a level 3 audience. Implications for the field of academic advising are noted. (SW)

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ACADEMIC ADVISING: IMAGES OF A PROFESSION

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Academic Advising: Images of a Profession

While chatting with a colleague during the St. Louis Conference, the 7th National Conference on Academic Advising, the topic of a program on ethics arose. I observed that during the six year tenure of the national conferences, I could recall no program that dealt with the topic of ethics in advising. Later, it occurred to me that the absence of programs on this issue might be an indication of the status of advising as a profession. As individuals and as groups we believe ourselves to be "professionals," and we believe our calling and our colleagues with whom we work and with whom we have established formal organizations to be "professional."

Presently, advising is not a profession. On what basis might one reach that conclusion? Two sets of criteria are suggested here: one borrowed from Sidney Dorros' work, Teaching as a Profession, and the other from Greenwood (1962). According to Dorros, a profession should have:

1. Concern with the welfare of society;
2. Command and application of specialized and systematic skills and knowledge;
3. Control by practitioners of admission into the profession;
4. High degree of autonomy in making decisions about how to perform work; and
5. Existence of a strong and viable professional association.

Greenwood's components of a profession are somewhat similar:

1. Basis of systematic knowledge;
2. Authority recognized by the clientele of the professional group;
3. Broader community sanction and approval of this authority;
4. A code of ethics regulating the relationship of professionals with clients and colleagues; and

5. A professional culture sustained by formal professional association.

Time and space limitations preclude a detailed examination of these criteria to determine the professional status of advising. My purpose is to focus the question so that others may join the dialogue in determining where advising is, where advising should be, or where advising on the national scale could be in terms of achieving some of the hallmarks of professionalism. At issue, then, is not whether or not I'm correct in asserting that advising is not a profession, but that the question of professional status and the attendant benefits and liabilities are examined and discussed within practitioner ranks.

Mestenhauser (1976), writing about professionalism of foreign student advisors, commented on several changes in educational institutions that are still relevant, and present, today. First is the emphasis on performance, accountability, merit, and cost accounting of programs. Second is an increased activity of other groups in the maintenance or defense of their own professional statuses. Third is the increasing politicization of some occupations in search of public acceptance, without which no professional group can hope to establish itself. Fourth is an increasing tendency toward unionization, which is, in effect, a step away from professionalization. Fifth, international education generally failed to obtain serious acceptance, and professionals with international interests are finding themselves to be on the periphery of their own professions. With the insertion of the terms "advising" or "student development" in selected locations, these five points appear to summarize quite adequately the state of affairs facing academic advising in many of our colleges and universities.

But what are we to do? After all, one just doesn't go out and create

a profession! Quite so, and if the field of student affairs is any guide, the task of profession-building is a long-term effort. To wit some thirty-five years ago, Wrenn and Darley (1949) employed a systematic analysis of the professional status of the field of student affairs. They reported that student affairs had made little progress toward (a) the application of standards of selection and training, (b) the definition of job titles and function, (c) the self-imposition of standards of admission and performance, and (d) the legal recognition of the vocation. The profession did get fairly good marks on (e) the development of a professional consciousness and of professional groups, (f) the performance of a socially needed function, (g) the possession of a body of specialized knowledge and skills, and (h) high moral and personal integrity in lieu of the development of a code of ethics.

Recently, Stamatakos (1981a, 1981b) repeated the review using the basic approach and methodology employed by Wrenn and Darley. He concluded that although the field of student affairs aspires and at the same time perceives itself as professional, achievements since the Wrenn-Darley review do not justify a claim of professional status. So what, the reader may ask. Who cares? What difference does all this make for me? Isn't it sufficient that I function with a good deal of professional competence?

Professional people function on three levels of development, although these levels are not necessarily determined by their skills or competencies. Rather, they are determined, according to Canon (1976), by the degree of orientation to the professional activity and unit of organization. He suggests that at the first level of functioning are staff whose primary identity is to their professional sub-specialty and sub-unit, e.g. peer advising, un-declared students, etc. Such staff people are generally unaware of others and thus spend a good deal of time either duplicating

what others are doing, or managing disputes and conflicts as to what others should not be doing, because this activity infringes on their own area of responsibility.

On the second level are staff whose primary identification is to the entire student enterprise. Their effectiveness is higher than the first level, becuase they function cohesively, securely, and cooperatively. On the other hand, other relationships with faculty, for example, are expressed in terms of "we" and "they." In the case of advising staff, these others might be non-advisor faculty or administrators outside the chain of command of advising.

Finally, on the third level of staff development, Canon places professionals whose "primary focus is on the institutional mission as viewed through the prism of a strong and sophisticated conceptualization of the purposes of higher education." Such staff people are the most effectively and conceptually linked with others, because their programs are interwoven with the bulk of the institution's goals that extend beyond the realm of "support services."

Canon suggests that the organizational behavior of these three levels is observable and researchable. That is to say for example, that if the field of advising is interested in assessing its status as a profession, this framework of levels of professional behavior may be of some assistance. Perhaps the three-level scheme might even be used to assess the National Conference on Academic Advising held October 23-26, 1983 in St. Louis. Professional associations exist for a number of good reasons, among which is the responsibility for providing creative, courageous, and assertive leadership that constantly challenges accepted assumptions, sets professional standards and goals, ventures into uncharted waters, elevates the thinking and operational levels of preparation and professional practice, and demands

outstanding performance of its members (Stamatakos, 1981b, p. 199). Within student affairs, examples of such lack of mature self assurance is amply evident in national conference programs that are conspicious in their absence of debates, intellectually stimulating and challenging symposia, and presidential speeches that agitate members to action. Furthermore, he goes on to say, the student affairs literature has tended to parallel convention programming - focusing on descriptions and how-to-do-it, and avoiding intellectual discourse.

How does one assess similar undertakings in the field of advising? Using the three-level framework suggested by Canon, I attempted to determine the level of professional development or functioning suggested by each of the programs at the St. Louis Conference. Omitting the featured speakers, regional and institutional meetings, roundtable discussions, and idea exchange, there were seventy-four presentations, beginning with the first-listed pre-conference workshop and ending with the last-listed session on Wednesday morning. My calculations suggest that thirty-four, or 46%, of the presentations were intended for an audience functioning at Level I. Twenty-nine, or 39% of the program offerings, were designed with a Level II audience in mind and eleven, or 15%, were directed toward the interests of a Level III audience.

Now the issue of substance here is not whether or not the criteria for this superificial analysis were sound, or that the reported percentages are accurate reflections of reality. Rather the issue is what does a neophyte professional organization do, or attempt to do, in using national, regional and local gatherings of personnel to further the aim of professionalization? This article began, you will recall, with the question of why topics on ethics had not yet found their way into convention programming.

The question at issue is not only whether or not advising personnel

want to become a profession (perhaps being a quality semi-profession is sufficient attainment), but also whether or not advising staff wish to operate on the third level of development suggested by Canon. The implications of such decisions are far-reaching, because this third level of professional functioning requires a sophistication of purpose and competencies characteristic of those who wish to shape institutions. Futurists of higher education tell us the time is ripe for major shifts within academe. Perhaps responding to needs within our colleges and universities and advancing the developmental level of our profession are one and the same.

Pat Cross (1981) commented that the student personnel profession has an unprecedented opportunity in these formative years of the learning society to provide the linking service between learners and providers in the most productive combinations (p. 104). Her message (1983) to advising and advisors at the 7th National Conference in St. Louis was much the same. In short, the time is now. As we increase the sophistication of advising service, we will continue to up-grade our standards, knowledge and levels of conceptualization of what we do, thus enhancing professionalization.

Might it also be appropriate to encourage our chosen leaders to provide us with leadership and the literary and public forums for debate and controversy, to expand our ideas of what it means to aspire to professional status? It may not even be too early to begin laying the groundwork for a systematic review of advising such as that completed for student affairs by Wrenn and Darley and by Stamatakos.

The task before us is to accept and respond cooperatively, systematically, and vigorously to the challenge that lies ahead. Will some of you join the fray?

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